



Blackbirds, newts and tadpoles

Over the summer The BTO has received a number of reports of unusual feeding behaviour by Blackbirds, normally feeding mainly on insects and earthworms, birds have been seen to actively take newts and tadpoles from garden ponds.

One BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatcher noted, one Blackbird would stand at the edge of the pond in his Hertfordshire garden, watching the surface. When a newt started to come up for air the Blackbird would jump forwards, land on a water lily leaf and grab the newt as it broke surface. Having lost three newts in this fashion, the pond was covered with netting.

Whilst in a Lincolnshire garden, one Blackbird was seen to fly two or three feet out over the pond to grab a surfacing newt; it was never seen to miss.

This sort of behaviour isn't just confined to newts, other Garden BirdWatchers have reported Blackbirds taking tadpoles from their ponds, in one Devon garden, a female Blackbird was seen to bring its young to the edge of the pond, and then go on to catch and feed tadpoles to the hungry youngsters.

A female Blackbird in a Buckinghamshire garden was seen to deliberately wipe the tadpoles she had caught in grit before feeding them to her young. If she was eating them herself she did not bother wiping them.

Blackbirds were also seen to catch dragonflies and, more unusually, one male Blackbird was seen to catch minnows from the shallow end a garden pond in Lancashire.

It is not just Blackbirds that have indulged in a spot of angling, Garden BirdWatchers have reported seeing Carrion Crows taking frogs and Magpies taking newts. Paul Stancliffe, Promotions Officer at the BTO stated, "*Garden BirdWatchers have submitted four million records since the survey began, providing scientists at the BTO with invaluable information, whilst making a huge contribution to our knowledge of this ever increasingly important habitat for wild birds.*"

Garden BirdWatch is the longest running survey of its kind in the world and has over 16,000 participants recording birds, bird behaviour and other wildlife in their gardens. If you have a garden and you watch your garden birds, then why not get involved in this important and exciting survey by contacting Garden BirdWatch on 01842 750050 or by writing to BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch, Room 43, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.

More>

The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

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Notes for Editors

- 1. The counties** that the BTO have received records of Blackbirds exhibiting this behaviour from are; Devon, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Somerset, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire and Lancashire.
- 2. Three species of newt** are found in the UK, Great Crested, Common or Smooth and Palmate. The Smooth Newt is the most widespread newt native to the UK, it occurs across most of England but is rarer in Wales and some parts of Scotland. The Palmate Newt is the smallest of the UK's newts and prefers slow moving water in wooded and hilly parts of the country. Great crested newts are Britain's largest newt species. Although now afforded some legal protection in the UK, populations have declined over recent years as a result of the destruction and fragmentation of their habitat.
- 3. The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch.** The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch is the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run weekly throughout the year, providing important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. Currently, some 16,500 people take part in the project. The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch is funded by participants' contributions and supported by CJ WildBird Foods Ltd and is the largest year round survey of garden birds anywhere in the world. For more information see www.bto.org/gbw
- 4. CJ WildBird Foods.** CJ WildBird Foods is Europe's leading supplier of bird food and bird feeding products. CJ WildBird Foods has been responsible for a number of significant developments within the bird food and feeding industry, including the introduction of black sunflower seeds to the UK as a major new bird food and the development of specialist seed mixes for use in tubular feeders. The company has also been supporting research into the changing fortunes of garden bird populations, most notably through the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch.
- 5. Bird Table Magazine.** *Bird Table* magazine is published quarterly and sent free to all BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatchers. An annual subscription to the project costs just £12 and all new joiners will receive a free copy of the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch Book (which normally retails for £9.99).
- 6. Colour photographs.** Images of garden birds are freely available for use in association with this press release. Please contact images@bto.org to request an electronic version.
- 7. Bird Information.** For lots of facts and figures about garden birds go to www.bto.org/birdfacts and for a list of the most frequently seen birds in Sussex's gardens go to <http://blx1.bto.org/gbw-dailyresults/results/gbwrt-pcode-GBWSU.html>
- 8.** The BTO has an ISDN line available for radio interviews.

For further information please contact.

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